Artificial Demons

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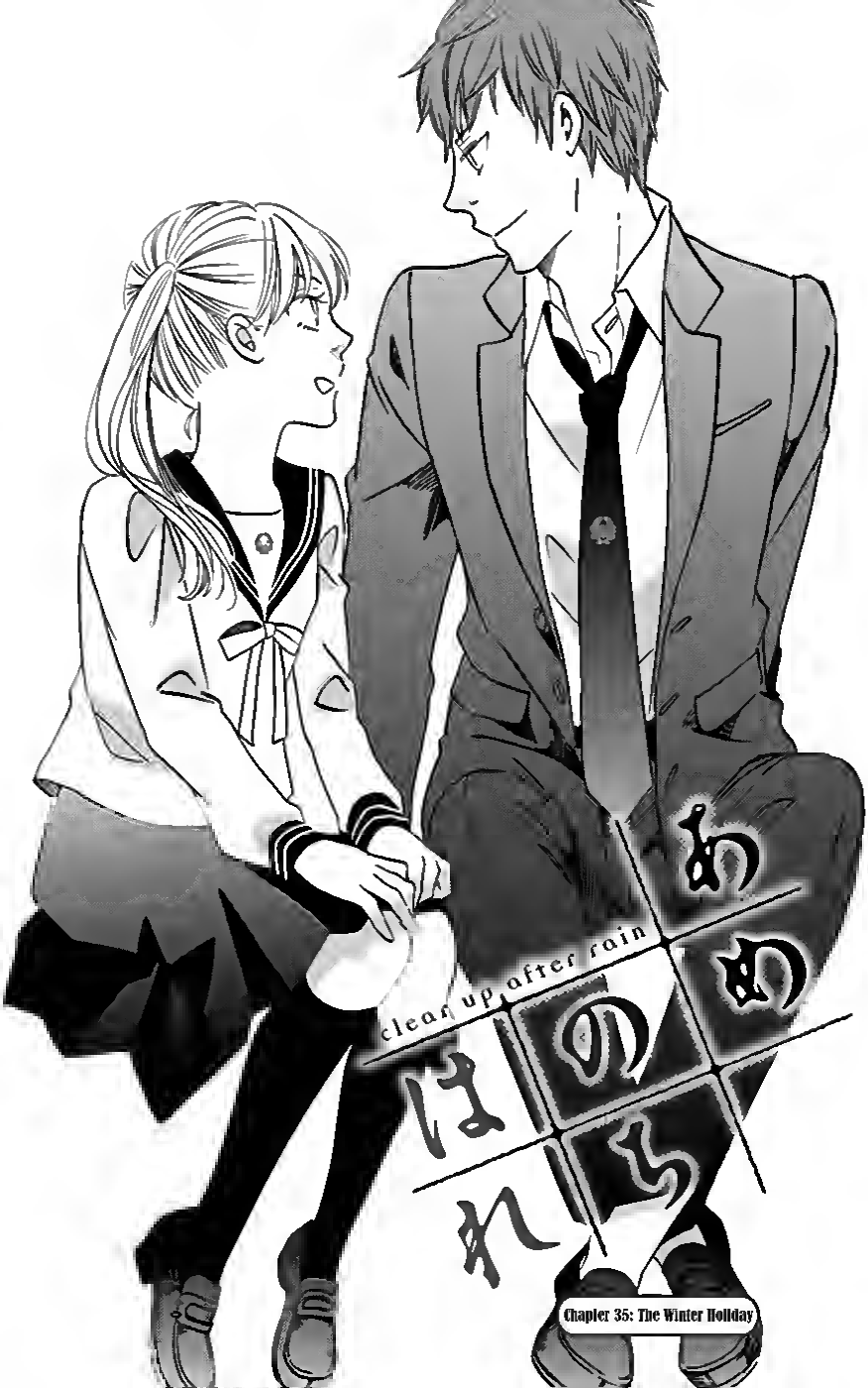
FROM FANS TO FANS. PLEASE SUPPORT THE AUTHOR BY PURCHASING THE ORIGINAL VERSION ONCE IT IS AVAILABLE IN YOUR COUNTRY.



Chapter 35: The Winter Holiday

OKAY, I'LL COME MEET YOU AT THE STATION.
AT WHAT TIME WILL YOU ARRIVE HERE?
EVEN THE DORM CLOSES OVER THE NEW YEAR HOLIDAY PERIOD SO I'LL TAKE THE BULLET TRAIN BEFORE IT GETS TOO CROWDED.
YEAH...
I'LL TAKE THE BULLET TRAIN HOME THIS EVENING.
YOU DON'T REALLY HAVE TO GO OUT OF YOUR WAY...
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, TODAY IS...
CHRISTMAS EVE.
IF WE DO THAT... IF WE MEET AT THE STATION...
THEN BEFORE GOING BACK TO THE HOUSE, DO YOU WANT TO STOP BY SOMEWHERE?

...SURE!
OUR SECOND SEMESTER IS OVER AND THE YEAR IS COMING TO AN END THE AMAGAI DORMITORY CLOSES OVER THE HOLIDAY PERIOD
I'M PLANNING TO RETURN AS SOON AS THE DORM OPENS AGAIN AFTER NEW YEAR, BUT...
...IT WOULD BE NICE IF IT DIDN'T RAIN WHILE WE ARE ALL HOME.

TH-THAT'S NOT REALLY WHAT I MEANT...
startled
WHAT'S THIS, GORO-CHAN? ARE YOU HOPING FOR A WHITE CHRISTMAS OR SOMETHING?
I WONDER...
...IF IT WILL SNOW.
IT IS PRETTY COLD, BUT NOT COLD ENOUGH FOR IT TO SNOW IT WOULD SEEM
IT REALLY IS COLD TODAY.
SHIVER
MAYBE I'LL WEAR THIS ON MY WAY BACK
WE ARE ALL DONE GETTING READY
Ooh, let's go then
SINCE WE DON'T KNOW WHETHER OR NOT WE TURN INTO GIRLS WHEN IT SNOWS,
I WOULD LIKE FOR THE WEATHER TO LAST OVER THE HOLIDAY

IS IT WEIRD TO WEAR THIS WHEN I'M A GUY?
NO, NOT AT ALL.
IT SUITS YOU, THAT SCARF.
YEAH...
EVEN THOUGH I WAS NOT THE ONE WHO RECEIVED IT...
Chatter
Chatter
Haru-chan!
Saiki-san!

OH, ARE YOU GUYS ALSO LEAVING TODAY?
SAIKI-SAN, HARUTO-SAN.
YOU HAVE HELPED US OUT A LOT OVER THE PAST YEAR. THANK YOU AND PLEASE CONTINUE TO DO SO IN THE FUTURE.
YES.
We are going to be eating Christmas cake back home.
SOUNDS NICE.

Oh! That's right, courtesy!!
SURE.
MY FAMILY HAS SENT A CAR TO PICK ME UP AND IT'S SUPPOSED TO ARRIVE SOON SO...
HAVE A SAFE TRIP
HAVE A GOOD NEW YEAR EVERYONE.
HAVE A GOOD NEW YEAR EVERYONE!
Saiki-san! Haru-chan! Thank you for taking care of us!
Please continue to do so in the new year!
What's this?

I came to pick you up.
YOU ALSO CAME?
ASUMI.
TAKUMA-CHAN!
YES, MOTHER SAID THAT I MIGHT AS WELL GO PICK YOU UP WHILE GOING OUT FOR GROCERIES
YOU GOT EVERYTHING? HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN YOUR PHONE OR SOMETHING?
ASUMI-CHAN!
OH, THE GIRL SCHOOL'S WINTER HOLIDAY ALSO STARTS TODAY?
YEAH, SAME AS THE BOYS'.

THAT SCARF...
I SEE.
Ah!
Waaa
Um...
It's just one that Tsukiko-chan forgot when she visited.
SHIT!
sweat
sweat
I was going to give it back to her now that I am going home.
But since today is cold I kinda ended up wearing it.
UWAH... THIS IS MAKING NO SENSE AT ALL ASUMI-CHAN IS ANGRY... ACTUALLY IT LOOKS LIKE SHE IS NOT LISTENING AT ALL

IF...
Yes?
IF I KNITTED ONE AND GAVE IT TO YOU, HAZUKI-KUN...
WOULD YOU WEAR IT?
Y-
YES.

Really!?
THEN AFTER NEW YEAR... I WILL DO MY BEST SO THAT YOU CAN HAVE IT SOMETIME IN JANUARY!
ASUMI! WE'RE LEAVING!
OKAY!
I'LL BE LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.
HAPPY NEW YEAR!
WELL THEN... HAPPY NEW YEAR!

I'M GLAD ONE OF THE LAST THINGS I SAW AT THE END OF THIS YEAR WAS ASUMI-CHAN'S SMILE.
IT'S ALMOST TIME FOR THE BULLET TRAIN TO LEAVE AND I'M CUTTING IT CLOSE SO I'LL BE LEAVING NOW
Happy new year!!
WELL THEN, A LOT OF STUFF HAPPENED OVER THIS PAST YEAR BUT LET'S COMBINE OUR STRENGTHS AGAIN NEXT YEAR AND OVERCOME WHATEVER MIGHT GET THROWN AT US.

I'M BACK.
OH, WELCOME BACK.
YOU ARE HOME EARLIER THAN I THOUGHT YOU WOULD BE.
THERE'S STILL SOME TIME UNTIL DINNER IS READY. ARE YOU HUNGRY?
HM? NO, I'M GOOD.
ARE YOU THE ONLY ONE IN THE HOUSE, MOM? WHERE IS MAYU?
THERE WAS SOMETHING THAT I FORGOT TO BUY SO I SENT HER OUT TO GET IT.
YOU COULD JUST HAVE SENT ME A MAIL AND I WOULD HAVE GOTTEN IT ON THE WAY..
I'm grabbing a drink.
Open

LATE... WORK?
PROBABLY, DON'T YOU THINK?
AZUSA-CHAN HAS BECOME EVEN CUTER, YOU KNOW.
SO LET'S WAIT WITH CUTTING THE CAKE UNTIL THEN, OKAY?
SHE SAID SHE WOULD BE LATE BUT MAKE IT IN TIME FOR DINNER, IT SEEMS.
MAYU SAID SHE WOULD.
IS AZUSA COMING?
NOW THAT YOU SAY SO, THAT'S RIGHT... BUT SINCE YOU NORMALLY AREN'T HERE, MADOKA, I DID NOT REALLY THINK ABOUT IT.
THERE REALLY ARE TWO WHOLE CAKES...

THIS... YOU WROTE THIS, RIGHT MOM?
SHE HAD SOMEWHAT LOST HER WAY BUT IT SEEMS SHE SOMEHOW MANAGED TO CHOOSE A CAREER PATH THAT SHE WANTS TO FOLLOW.
WHEN I SAW HER THE OTHER DAY SHE WAS ALMOST GLOWING.
I KNOW.
HMM? OH, THE HEADLINE FOR THE HISTORY DRAMA THAT IS GOING TO BE BROADCAST OVER THE NEW YEAR?
YES, I SAW THE POSTER AT THE STATION...
AND RECOGNIZED YOUR HANDWRITING RIGHT AWAY.
年始歴史ドラマ
1/2 18:00~23:00
空の彼方

ONE OF MY SENPAIS AT THE DORM, WHO IS ALSO THE DORM SUPERVISOR...
HAS DECIDED THAT HE WANTS TO SERIOUSLY PURSUE A PIANO CAREER AND HAS DECIDED TO LEAVE THE DORM.
I DON'T KNOW WHY HE BECAME THE DORM SUPERVISOR WHEN HE WAS ALREADY DOING PIANO, BUT...
HE PROBABLY HAD A LOT OF WORRIES, I THINK.
.....
...THIS IS STILL THE SAME STORY, BUT...
WHEN I WAS LOOKING AT UNIVERSITIES...
Step
Step
I'm back! I ran into Azusa on the way and brought her with me!

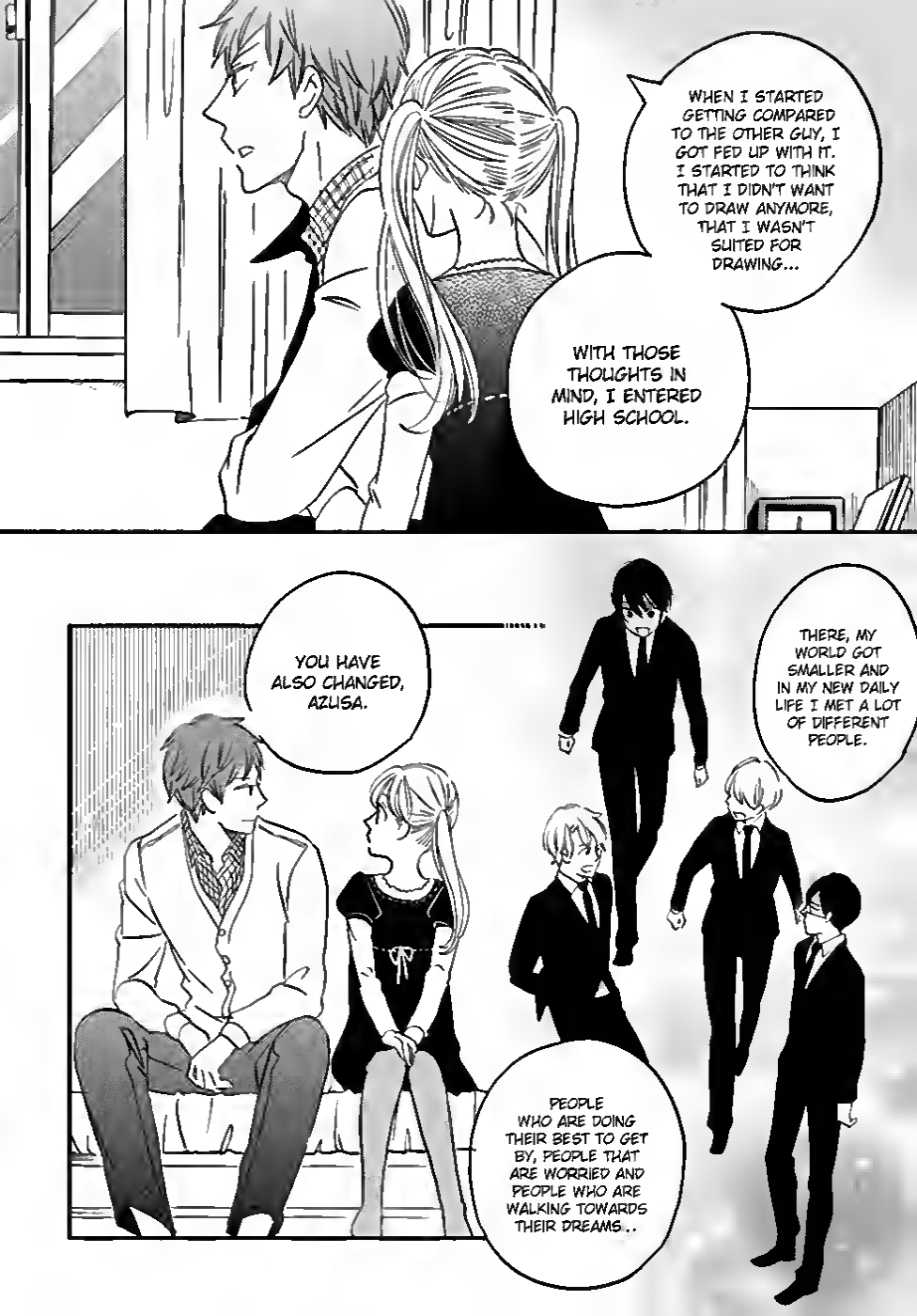
I'M SORRY THAT SHE HAD YOU CARRY EVERYTHING AGAIN, AZUSA-CHAN.
WELCOME!
MADOKA, WE WILL CONTINUE THIS LATER, OKAY?
THANKS FOR HAVING ME!
SIGH... AZUSA, WAIT HERE. I'LL GO DROP OFF MY LUGGAGE.
MADOKA, YOU WILL JUST BE A NUISANCE SO GO WATCH TV WITH AZUSA-CHAN OR SOMETHING.
I'LL HELP YOU MAKE THE SALAD.
Nuisance... Why you...

IT'S BEEN AWHILE SO CAN I SEE YOUR ROOM?
I HAVEN'T BEEN BACK IN AGES SO NOTHING HAS CHANGED, YOU KNOW.
Sorry for the intrusion.
LET ME HANG UP YOUR COAT.
THANKS.
NEITHER ME NOR THE ROOM HAVE CHANGED.

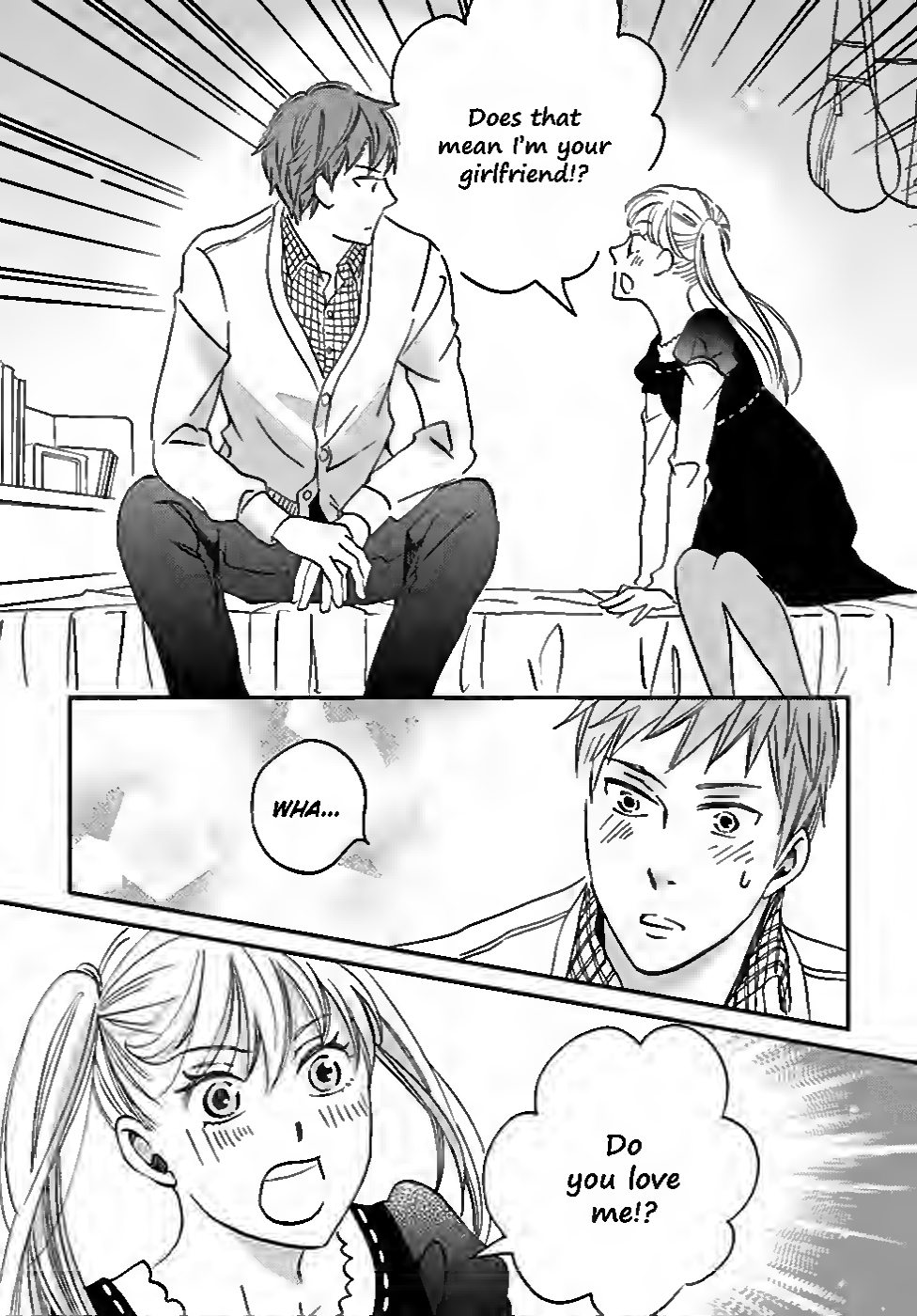
AZUSA IS THE ONLY ONE... SHE IS ALMOST GLOWING...
SCRIPT...
MMH...
I HEARD YOU WERE WORKING TODAY BUT YOU ARE NOT WEARING ANY MAKEUP?
SAY... YOU KNOW...
THAT'S BECAUSE WE WERE JUST DOING THE LAST INTRODUCTIONS OF THE YEAR AND RECEIVING THE SCRIPT TODAY.

WHAT...?
I...
NOW... I HAVE DECIDED TO DO MY BEST WITH MY CURRENT JOB.
BUT THAT MEANS I'LL HAVE TO RENOUNCE ON GOING TO AMAGAI.
IT'S ALWAYS BEEN MY DREAM SO EVEN IF IT MEANS BEING UNABLE TO ATTEND THE SCHOOL NEXT TO YOURS, MADOKA...
COULD IT BE THAT I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AFRAID OF HEARING AZUSA SAY THIS?
BUT NOW THAT I HAVE HEARD IT, I FEEL RELIEVED.

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, I WOULD COPY MY MOTHER'S WRITING IN THE CLASSROOM SINCE I WAS ALSO PRACTICING CALLIGRAPHY THERE WAS ALSO ANOTHER GUY PRACTICING WHO WAS AROUND MY AGE
IN THE BEGINNING, WE BOTH STEADILY GOT BETTER OVER TIME.
BUT AT ONE POINT, I JUST WASN'T GETTING ANY BETTER...
I'M GLAD...
THAT YOU MANAGED TO DECIDE IT FOR YOURSELF, AZUSA.
EVEN IF MY LIFE IS STAGNATING, IT DOESN'T MEAN THAT I SHOULD HOLD AZUSA BACK WITH ME.
EH?
I DID NOT WANT TO TELL YOU THIS STORY, BUT...


WHEN I STARTED GETTING COMPARED TO THE OTHER GUY, I GOT FED UP WITH IT. I STARTED TO THINK THAT I DIDN'T WANT TO DRAW ANYMORE, THAT I WASN'T SUITED FOR DRAWING...
WITH THOSE THOUGHTS IN MIND, I ENTERED HIGH SCHOOL.
YOU HAVE ALSO CHANGED, AZUSA.
THERE, MY WORLD GOT SMALLER AND IN MY NEW DAILY LIFE I MET A LOT OF DIFFERENT PEOPLE.
PEOPLE WHO ARE DOING THEIR BEST TO GET BY, PEOPLE THAT ARE WORRIED AND PEOPLE WHO ARE WALKING TOWARDS THEIR DREAMS..

I LOVE YOUR CALLIGRAPHY WRITING, MADOKA.
THANKS.
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT THE DAY WOULD COME WHERE YOU WOULD BE THE ONE PUSHING ME FORWARD, AZUSA.
YOU KNOW... I'M ATTENDING A BOARDING SCHOOL SO GOING TO SCHOOL TOGETHER IS IMPOSSIBLE, AND...
IT CAN'T BE EVERY DAY SINCE IT'S FAIR BUT IF YOU ARE ALRIGHT WITH IT JUST BEING EVERY NOW AND AGAIN, I'LL GO OUT WITH YOU AFTER SCHOOL.
Really!?
GOING TO SCHOOL TOGETHER AND GOING SOMEWHERE TO HANG OUT AFTERWARDS? SOMETHING LIKE THAT, RIGHT?
WHAT WAS YOUR DREAM AGAIN?
YES.

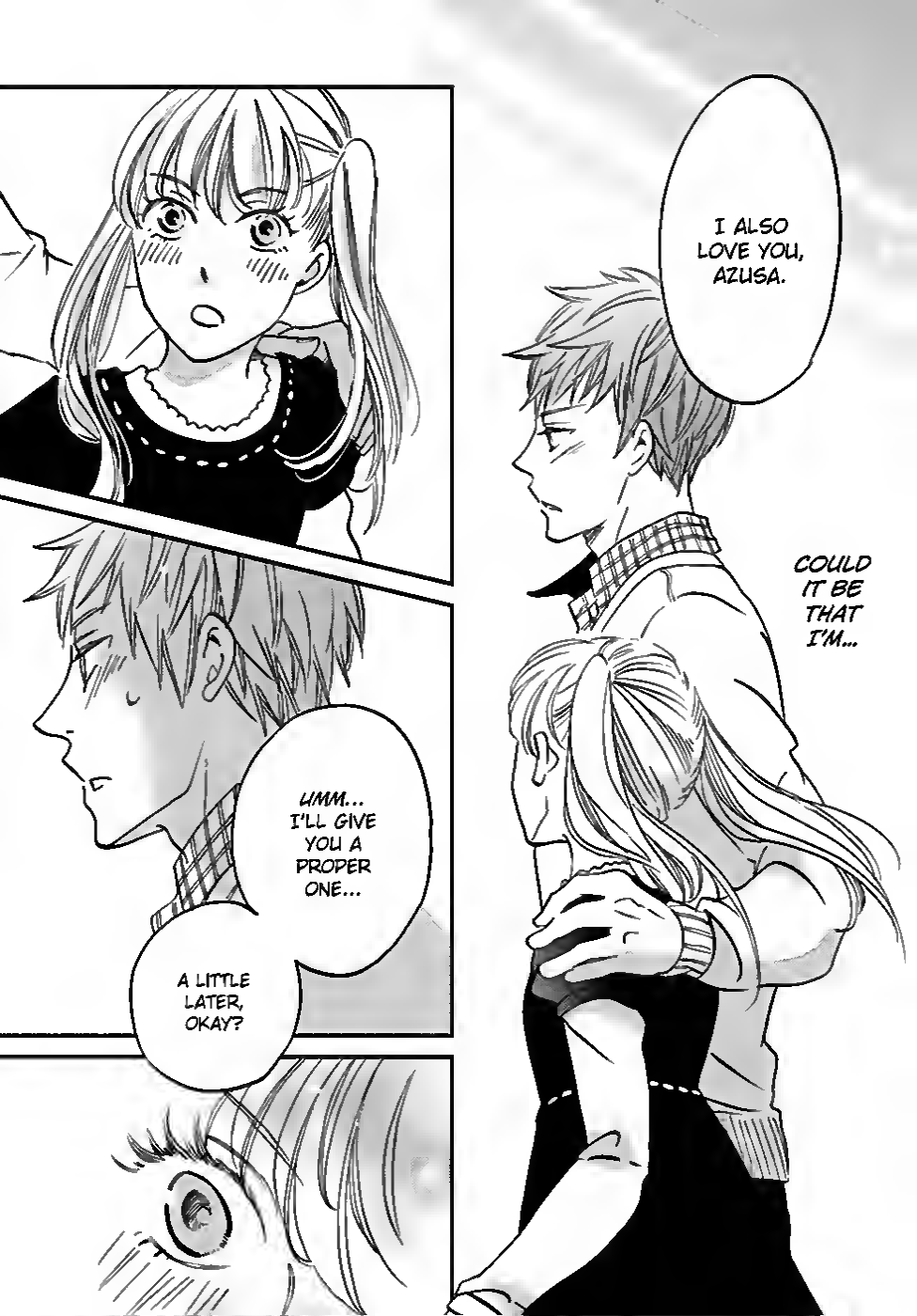

Does that mean I'm your girlfriend!?
WHA...
Do you love me!?

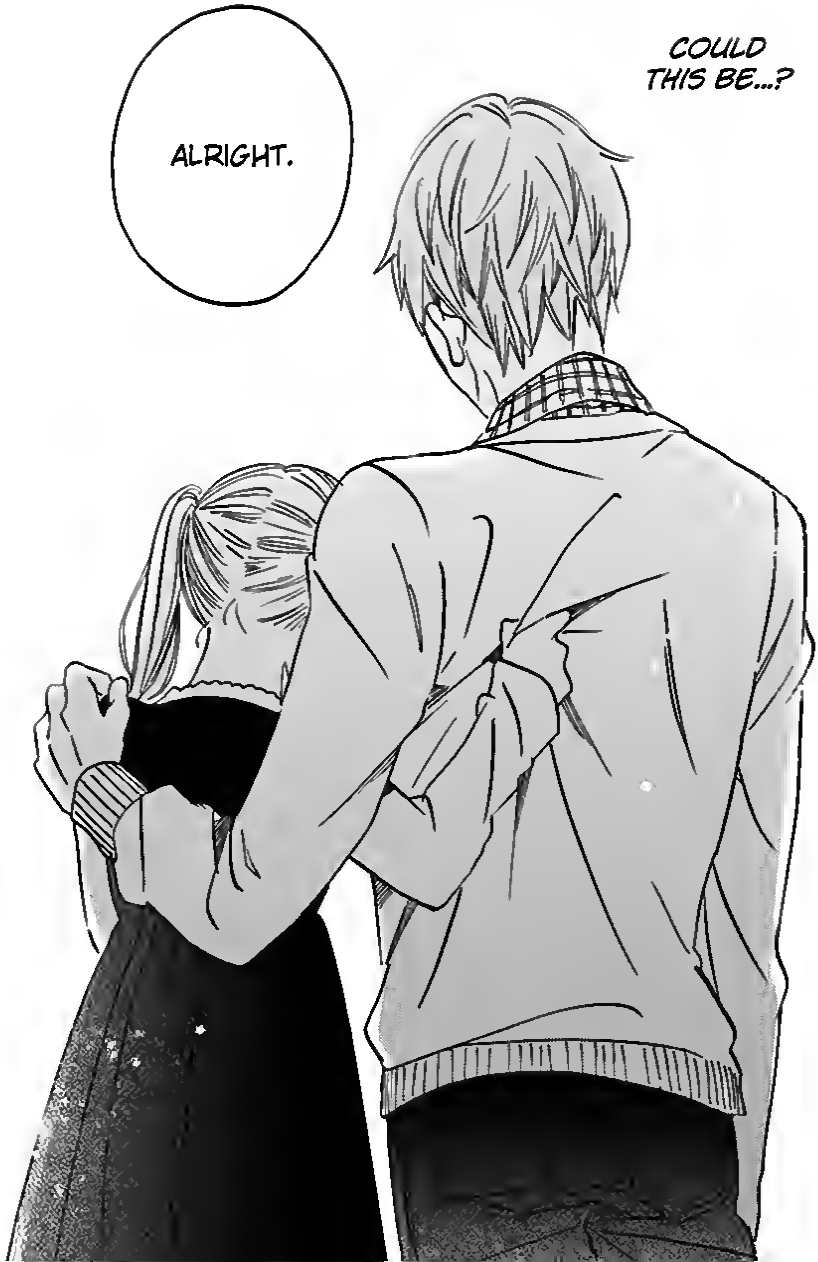
I LOVE YOU, MADOKA.
THIS GIRL HAS ALWAYS BEEN YOUNGER THAN ME...
JOKINGLY BEING CALLED MY FIANCE BY MY PARENTS...
TO THINK THAT THIS GIRL THAT HAS TEASED ME... THAT I HAVE BEEN JEALOUS OF.
Push
TO THINK I COULD FIND HER CUTE
WA-!
FALL

THUMP
AREN'T YOU SCARED...?
I'M NOT SCARED.
I KNOW SHE IS ACTING TOUGH...

SINCE I HAVE EXPERIENCED WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE A GIRL BOTH MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS.
GRAB
!!
Kiss
What- That's it!?
Puhaha
What a weird expression.

Azusa~! Madoka! Dinner is ready!
Reality isn't so exciting.
Dinner is ready.
THEY ARE CALLING SO SHALL WE GET GOING?
grab
MEANIE.


I ALSO LOVE YOU, AZUSA.
COULD IT BE THAT I'M...
UMM... I'LL GIVE YOU A PROPER ONE...
A LITTLE LATER, OKAY?


ALRIGHT.
COULD THIS BE...?

clear up after rain
by sikke

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